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**Food Practices and Traditional Medicine
among the Muslims of Hyderabad**

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**Food Practices and Traditional Medicine
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This paper deals with the influence of the Indo-Persian medical tradition on Muslim cookery in Hyderabad. It aims at an understanding of the cultural personality of the Hyderabad Muslim community through the study of the complex links it has woven between culinary and medical knowledge. It is based on the preliminary findings of a research project of the French Institute, Pondicherry, entitled "Food practices and cultural identity". Through the case study of Muslim cookery in Hyderabad, it proposes to shed light on a neglected aspect of Indian history, namely the history of material culture. The perspective adopted here is that of anthropological history.

The cultural contact between Islam and India, as A. Wink has pointed out in his *Al-Hind*, has been much talked about, but still remains to be seriously investigated¹. Contrary to what happened in Europe, this contact developed historically into an integrative process. But along what lines and under which conditions? This is the type of questions which this paper attempts to tackle. The Muslims of Hyderabad have experienced 400 years of cultural intermingling with the Hindu populations of Telingana and Marathwada. Yet their cookery still presents a distinctive cultural pattern, the origin of which can be traced back to the earliest years of Muslim civilization. This paper is thus concerned with the general question of the validity of the tradition vs. modernity model, and with the modes and processes of cultural integration, both topics which have figured prominently in the academic debates in recent years.

As will be shown here, the study of crude technical facts can provide tools of analysis to the historian of Indian culture, all the way from its material to its emotional aspects, as cookery deals with both. This paper gives indications regarding the types of sources and questions with which the historian of food practices in the subcontinent has to deal. While this field of research is already well-trodden ground in Europe, it has hardly been touched upon as far as India is concerned.

1. see WINK

Obviously, it will have to be approached at first through Indian categories¹.

THE STUDY AREA

The present case study bears on the food habits of the Muslims of Hyderabad city in the Deccan, an urban area historically defined as the past twin cities of Golconda-Hyderabad and the present twin cities of Hyderabad-Secunderabad. Hyderabad proper was founded 400 years ago by Muhammad Quli, fifth king of the kingdom of Golconda, and heir to the Qutb Shahi dynasty. It comprised initially about 500 000 people, and now accommodates with the utmost difficulty more than 4.2 million inhabitants. This population is about 40% Muslim, and the city is regarded, alongside Delhi and Lucknow, as one of the major centres of Muslim culture in India.

The Muslim population of Hyderabad, however, holds a specific position in that it grew as an isolate in a culturally foreign environment. Though they were never really cut off from the North Indian Muslim groundswell and its Central Asian and Middle Eastern hinterlands, the Muslim rulers of the Deccan rose to power in defiance of their North Indian overlords. As subjects of the Deccan kings, and because of their relative geographical remoteness, the Muslims of Hyderabad worked at first towards greater integration with the numerically dominant Hindu population². In addition, with a view to maintaining a firm political alliance, the Muslim population of the Deccan - which was mainly urban and most numerous in Hyderabad - also cultivated strong friendship links with Persia³. This gave a specific shade to their culture, which imbibed a noteworthy Shi'a influence, and nurtured a rich tradition of cultural exchange with Persia, in which scholars, poets and religious leaders figured prominently, as also in recent times... the owners of the Irani "hotels" which are seen everywhere in the city nowadays.

1. see MARRIOTT 1990.

2. An integration process that can be illustrated in the field of poetry (the Muslim kings were sponsors of Telugu literature, the Telugu poets in turn writing on Muharram), of architecture (Hindu motives like mud pots or lotus leaves were used on mosques, as seen on Hagat Bakshi Begum's mausoleum).

3. From the reign of Muhammed Quli onwards, envoys were regularly exchanged between the kingdom of Golconda and Persia. The first mission was that of the Persian Agharlu Sultan, sent by Shah Abbas Safarvi in 1603 with rich presents. In return, the Qutb Shahi king sent Qamhar Ali and Mehdi Quli.

Another important factor in the cultural background of the Muslims of Hyderabad is their checkered political history in the local context. As a community, they have been for more than 300 years the politically and economically dominant group in the town. In the early 20th century, they could claim to be the ruling class of the biggest princely state in India - a class which consisted in actual fact of a handful of noblemen surrounded by clients and servants, who rightly regarded themselves as copartners in the interests and even culture of their patrons. Their king was one of the richest men in the world. Because the founder of the Asaf Jahi dynasty had risen from the rank of a Governor posted in the Deccan by the Mogul Emperor, his successors could claim to be heirs to the fallen Empire. This resulted in efforts on the part of the Hyderabadi Muslims to preserve the Moghlai way of life, as embodied in poetry meetings, long courtly dresses, endless salaams and food fit for the Emperors.

The creation of the State of Andhra Pradesh in the 1950's ushered in an era of a deep sociological and economic change for this comfortably settled community. In a general way, its reaction to the new turn of things was an expression of distrust and bitterness against the numerically dominant and now omnipotent Hindu community. Nowadays, the Muslim cultural heritage can be said to be more of a relic of a glamorous past than a reality. But it deserves attention because of the degree of refinement it had reached, and because of the great efforts that are expended to preserve it.

The specificity of Muslim cookery in Hyderabad is an outcome of this complex history. This cookery has a strong regional flavour¹, it retains the sophistication of the Persian tradition², and it is rich in fat, meat and sugar, as befits a community which claims to be heir to the Mogul empire. For these reasons, this cookery has always attracted the interest of observers³. Ever since the 17th century, foreign travellers have drawn attention to the quality and taste of the food products used. Local poets have praised the glitter of the tables at the court festivities⁴. Now that the glitter is fading away, the cookery remains as one of the

1. Marked by the use of numerous local *bhajis* or green leafy vegetables such as *ambada*, the use of the tamarind juice or the abundance of red chillies, which is not at all typical of the purely moghlai cookery.

2. for example *byriani*, *haleem*, *falooda* are said to be of Iranian origin.

3. see for example BERNIER, TAVERNIER, THEVENOT.

4. see SIDDIQUI, ZORE, JAFER.

last cultural strongholds in the overwhelmingly Hindu environment. It thus represents a choice object of study for the historian of food habits.

Beneath this rich culinary tradition, however, lie deeper motivations. Muslim cooks insist that their specialities are not only better but healthier: besides flattering taste, they also take care of the body. A number of Hyderabadi recipes, as a matter of fact, are presented as actual prescriptions. This points to another distinctive feature of Muslim culture in Hyderabad, namely the privileged position which it recognizes to a traditional form of medicine called Greek or Unani medicine. Ever since the accession to power of the Qutb Shahis, the kings of Hyderabad were patrons of this science, and the Asaf Jahi kings (1723-1947) were the first rulers in India to recognize Unani medicine officially.⁵

The motivations of the Hyderabadi Muslims, as regards food practices, are thus medical as well as culinary, and they accordingly combine both concerns in a medico-culinary discourse. This paper is not concerned with the curative efficacy of this tasty brand of medicine, but with its logic and mode of operation. In other words, its object is to investigate the structure of this medico-culinary discourse, the body of knowledge on which it stands, and the relative roles assigned by it to the doctor and to the cook.

With this purpose in mind, we will necessarily have to go a long way back in time, to the historical origins of the Indo-Persian variant of Muslim civilization.

METHODOLOGY

This study has been done in two stages, and at two different levels of analysis. It has arisen from informal remarks collected from Hyderabadi Muslims concerning food and the requirements of hygiene, and from the observation of their daily food practices. It is therefore partly based on field notes taken and interviews conducted among Muslim families during a year's stay in Hyderabad (February 1990 to February 1991). Both Shi'a and Sunni Muslims were interviewed and studied, issuing from different socio-cultural backgrounds (all the way from top official to school-teacher or book-binder) and from all parts of the twin cities, from the oldest to the most modern neighbourhoods.

1. Nizam the Vith, 1869-1911.

Interestingly, no significant variations were observed in correlation with this social diversity as far as the specific object of this study is concerned, namely the links between cookery and medicine.

The people interviewed were seldom found to hold well structured views on the subject, nor were they usually aware of the scholarly origins of their own practices. Those who were had acquired this knowledge from personal enquiries and not out of received wisdom. The Muslims of Hyderabad, by and large, are content to repeat a body of knowledge which has been passed down with occasional distortions from generation to generation, and which often amounts nowadays to little more than a limited number of endlessly quoted principles, such as the ban on the admixture of milk and fish, which is held to be conducive to leprosy, or the advisability of adding cream to mango puree in the summer, so as to avoid getting "heated up". All the Muslims interviewed, however, possessed a minimum knowledge of food hygiene - though of a very specific kind as will be seen - to which they often refer in daily life, and always in case of ailment.

In the process of studying these everyday practices and the popular discourse surrounding them, it has become necessary to engage in research work on the old texts, in order to explore the learned origins of this "folk science". This research, which involved numerous types of sources, has been conducted in the libraries of Hyderabad. Three main kinds of documents have been used in writing this paper: medical treatises, cook books and poetical works. Being born out of different motivations and written with different perspectives, these texts provide a multidimensional, and therefore more realistic, image of the Hyderabadi cookery. They reveal, for instance, in what way the doctors' concern for hygiene influenced culinary techniques and the subtleties of gastronomy.

The seemingly empirical conceptions of the Hyderabadi Muslims are in fact grounded on the Unani medico-philosophical system. Unani is the Urdu word for Greek. The Unani medical knowledge is a heir to the theories of Hippocrat (460-377 B.C.) and Galen (131-210 A.D.), whose works were translated into Arabic under the Abbassids in the 8th and 9th centuries, mainly at the instigation of Harun-al-Rashid and his son Mamun. Persian translations of these works were introduced in India in the 10th and 11th centuries. The concepts that are set out in them were popularized by the famous Avicenna, amongst others. At the time of the Mongol onslaught on Central Asia, doctors and scholars fled to the neighbouring countries, including India, carrying Unani treatises

with them. They were welcomed by the Sultans of Delhi, who were in good terms with Baghdad, and their medicine soon became popular in the whole subcontinent. From the 15th to the 17th centuries, a number of Unani hospitals and research centers developed in the Deccan. The Qutb Shahi dynasty, which maintained close contacts with Persia, sponsored the blossoming of Unani medicine in Hyderabad during its heyday (end of 16th to end of 17th century). Mohammed Quli (1580-1612), the founder of the city, himself established a *darush-shifa* ("health house"), which was both a hospital with a capacity of 400 "beds" and a teaching center. The kings of Hyderabad enjoyed discussing with their *hakims* (Unani doctors), and encouraged them to write treatises, the manuscripts of which have been preserved in some cases.

The *Mizam-ul-Tabaye Qutb Shahi* and the *Zubdat-ul-Hikam*, which have been used for this paper, are two such treatises. These texts, written in Farsi, are 17th century manuscripts of Unani medical works compiled for the Qutb Shahi kings of Golconda-Hyderabad. They are now preserved in the library of the Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad.

The first of these treatises deals mainly with the description of drugs and compounds, but also includes four prefaces which provide a theoretical framework for the understanding of the principles of Unani medicine. It was written on behalf of Muhammed Qutb Shah, 6th king of Golconda (1612-1626), to remedy the deficiencies of the medical works of the time. The author, Taqiuddin Mohammad bin Sadruddin Ali, exerted himself to write the perfect medical treatise, which he entitled "The Balance of Temperaments". He actually distanced himself quite perceptibly from the recognized authorities, occasionally indulging in overt criticism of their conclusions.

The second manuscript, authored by the hakim Shamsuddin bin Nooruddin, was dedicated to Muhammed Quli Qutb Shah (1580-1612). This treatise is essentially concerned with hygiene, and deals with preventive medicine. It describes the mistakes which any man must avoid in order to keep a good health, mainly in terms of the rational choice of food and drinks. The IVth discourse is entirely devoted to the description of foods and their properties, the classification of which runs into 14 chapters. The work draws heavily on the writings of Avicenna, parts of which are occasionally incorporated in the text in word for word translation.

This paper is also based on 19th century works, written by and meant for Hyderabadis, and dealing in priority with culinary matters. The *Tofat-ul-Lazat Mahboobia* or *Khwan-e-Nimat Asafiya* is a very complex cookery book published in 1883, undoubtedly written under the inspiration of a 17th century Persian source, the manuscript of which is presently kept in the library of the Salar Jung Museum under the title *Khwan-e-Nimat*. Another cookery book of the same period has been used, namely the *Zabdati-Nimat Abbassi*, which although less sophisticated, provides interesting information on cookery practices.

Also pertaining to the subject is a treatise of good manners (*adab*) entitled *Nauratan Abbassi*, which was written by Sahab Muhammad Abdullah in 1889-90. The book sets the standard for the perfect Hyderabad gentleman in all matters, and besides providing advice on how to choose horses, jewels, properties or servants, also defines the characteristics of a good cook, of good rice and fruit, and of a perfect menu.

Lastly, as regards the culinary practices of the earlier centuries, information has been drawn from the poetical works of the Qutb Shahi period. While dealing with the themes of love, princely life and marriage, they also describe the *dastarkhan* of the lovers, kings or newly-weds concerned. The *masnavi Gulshen-e-Ishq*, for example, depicts the preparation of a wedding feast, while the *masnavi Mah-wo Paikan Az* provides a detailed account of the food served at a wedding, including the reactions of the guests to the dishes served.

THE FOLK SCIENCE OF FOOD AND HEALTH

It is hard not to engage in conversation about cookery with the Hyderabad Muslims. From top to bottom of the social scale, people share in a common dream of well-flavoured *byrianis* and very hot *kababs*, a dream which they fulfil as often as possible, though sometimes at the expense of dangerous financial acrobatics. Travelling on a bus on a Monday morning is almost equivalent to reading a culinary magazine: women exchange the recipes they have tried during the week-end, that of a sister-in-law's *chutney* or of a new sweet... The town actually abounds in "hotels" - by which is meant very simple restaurants - bakeries, sweet shops and other tongue ticklers. It can boast to be considered as a temple of gastronomy, which people, throughout India and even beyond, are usually prompt to label as "Moghlai".

A concern for healthy food

Food in Hyderabad, however, is not simply a question of art or pleasure. It is also, complementarily, a serious matter. While the Muslims of Hyderabad are in the habit of always insisting that their guests have more of their dishes, they do so with well-advised discrimination. One will not simply give any type of food to anyone. The basic presupposition, in Hyderabad as everywhere in India, is that the food consumed determines the physical and moral state of the eater. People therefore are careful about what they cook and ingest: quality here takes precedence over quantity. What is specific about Muslim cookery in Hyderabad, however, is that it aims at the highest quality in both regards: the gastronomic and the dietetic.

Hot and cold properties of food

The Muslims of Hyderabad of course define the quality of food by means of a number of hedonist parameters such as smell, look, taste and satisfaction gained, but "medical" criteria also play a role. Food products are classified into two distinct groups, described as hot and cold, both qualities referring to inner properties of the food which influence the health of the eater. This type of classification is found under one form or other in virtually every society, but it is seldom expressed in such outright terms. In Western societies, it appears under the guise of the male/female contrast¹. In Hinduism, it is overshadowed

1. As the latest sociological studies of food habits show: salad and all greens, fish and all sea products (that could be marked as cold by Hyderabadis) are commonly considered as suitable for and preferred by women where men would choose red meat and carbohydrates (hot food for Hyderabadis). This seems to be specially true for men from the middle class, who have to assert their power, often confused with their potency. It has to do of course with the modern concern for the feminine figure and the diet the women are likely to prefer is the less caloric one. It is however backed by deeper mental structures like Dumézil's tripartite division of society: blood and therefore red meat is the attribute of the man/warrior and sexually potent, while the vegetarian oriented diet is the mark of a lower being (because still very much attached to the soil and its products) or of a peaceful, even fragile being (needing therefore to be protected) be it the woman or the priest. Also, something of the original murder still remains attached to the piece of steak, as well as something indecent, it seems, for the "naturally" shy woman to devour it. When this type of hot/violent versus cold/peaceful classification is used by Hyderabadi Muslims, they never point out a possible link with the division of the sexes.

by the opposition between pure and impure.¹

Among the Hyderabad Muslims, curd, for instance, is considered as cold food, even when served boiling hot, and ginger as hot food, even under ice-cream form. Mangoes, as well as red meat, are hot, while milk and melons are cold. These designations are either rooted in tradition or based on analytical logic. When pristine knowledge fails to provide answers, as is the case when a new food product is introduced, classification is effected on the grounds of analogy: watery fruit and vegetables are expected to be "cold" as cucumbers are, while food products heavy with blood - and hence with energy - are likely to be "hot" - or energetic.

A concordance, about which more will be said later on, is apparent here between these categories and the primary elements, here water and fire, of the classical Greek and Indian cosmogonies.

As is often the case with food classifications, the fundamental hot/cold opposition branches off into various secondary antinomies such as spicy/bland, or, in Hyderabad, sweet (*mitha*, which really means bland)/sour (*khatta*). It is thus customary to distinguish between *mithi dal* and *khatti dal*. The sourness is traditionally obtained by mixing tamarind juice into the dish, but there are variants, such as the admixture of raw mango (*kairi*), sweet lime (*mosambi*) or diverse very sour berries (*belambu*, *harpha rauri*). Bland food, however, should not be mistaken for tasteless food. A tasteless preparation, which is the gravest possible crime in the Hyderabad culinary logic, is pejoratively dubbed as *phika*. This term is never used without a point of disdain. It is *mitha* that is used as the contrary/complementary of *khatta*. As a matter of fact, one of the typical features of Hyderabad Muslim cookery is the association of a sour with a "sweet" dish in every meal, a practice which aims at preventing illness. Similarly, fresh cream, which is considered "cold", must be added to the "hot" mango puree in the summer for the sake of good health.

1. Even though DUMONT's formulation has been severely questioned (see MARRIOTT) the pure/impure logic is nonetheless basic in Hindu thought and practices. Traditional Hindus will be in the first place concerned with the purity status of food, not with its taste or medical properties. A suitable meal for them is a meal cooked by the appropriate cook for a particular eater, according to his rank on the scale of ritual purity.

Mixing and matching foods

In fact, these antinomies only make sense from the point of view of the possible combinations of foods, and of the combination of foods with outer elements. Any food, in the first place, must combine properly with the eater. According to Hyderabadi informants, a person who is subject to colds - a state not always accompanied by external manifestations such as temperature or sore throat - had better avoid eating cucumbers. Similarly, a pregnant woman must not eat papayas, because the heat of this fruit is said to cause premature delivery. In fact, all the constituents of a meal, both inner and outer, have to be correctly harmonized, from food products to cooking utensils, season, place, and the individual the meal is meant for. Tamarind flavored dishes were formerly cooked in earthenware pots only, while other cooking was conducted in copper or silver. If skin diseases are nowadays so common in Hyderabad, the reason is to be found, or so people say, in the widespread use of other cooking media - cheap aluminium mainly.

Matching menus to seasons is a favorite topic among Hyderabadi Muslims. This provides them with a ready excuse to enjoy seasonal products in plenty. They boast that they can live on mangoes crushed with cream during the whole summer, a diet which indisputably helps one to endure the terrible heat. But their concern is always expressed in terms of health-care. In the summer, more curd, onions, raw mangoes and sour products are consumed. In winter there will be more *toovar dal*, *byriani*, meat, and *halwa sohan* (a rich sweet made of fried bread and chick-pea filling, served with spoonfuls of ghee). The rainy season is the time for more sour dishes, but not for curd or greens. Food, as a rule, has to be adapted to climate. It is essential in dry and hot Hyderabad to consume a lot of sour food, or so people say. It must be noted that this high consumption of sour products is the cause of many acidity problems among the Muslim population of Hyderabad, a fact which of course remains unacknowledged. It is also said in Hyderabad that eating sweets in the morning (a luxury reserved for North Indians) is dangerous. But one cannot but recall that noblemen during the golden age of the Nizam were accustomed to eat sweets all day long, beginning at breakfast.

The point then, for whoever wants to keep in good health, is to find the proper balance between cold and hot, or sour and sweet foods. Since so many elements, all the way from the cooking pan to the weather, possess active properties, the task is a delicate one. But one can bring opposed values into play in order to restore a disturbed

balance. "Cold" food will thus do good to a man suffering from fever or heartburns, as will *ajowan* seeds (*trachyspermum ammi*) in the middle of the winter to one who needs a warm-up owing to lack proper clothes.

Hyderabadis actually know by heart lists of such associations, good and bad. As an example of harmful mixing of foods, they always refer to fish + milk product, which is believed to cause leprosy. The association of fish and vinegar is often mentioned as a variant with similarly baneful effects. As regards good combinations, the best known ones are red chillies and ghee, mango and cream, tamarind and sugar, etc. These healthy associations are conceived as combinations of dangerous substances with their antidotes (*badrara*).

There is no total ban on any food as far as health requirements are concerned: the most dangerous product can be taken if matched with its corrective. The stress in popular wisdom is therefore on hygiene and the prevention of ailments through the rational choice of food combinations.

The meal: a cosmogonic view

The Muslims of Hyderabad, in the operation of cooking, have to deal with a wide array of concerns and must control a large number of factors in order to circumscribe the perverse effects of food. Each and every kind of sickness, in their system of thought, can be ascribed to food poisoning¹, and the cause of any bodily disorder will be found in a wrongly conceived meal. Stories are told in all families regarding sudden deaths caused by food "allergy". Every individual seems to know which foods are harmful to him/her: women who have a tendency to swelling will give up bananas, asthmatic patients will shun guavas, whole families will avoid eating sugar because they believe they are allergic to it and its ingestion will cause headache and vomiting. The personal temperament of the eater is but one of the many factors that must be taken into account. The Hyderabad cooks are intellectually equipped to identify the right combinations, because they know full well that, besides the cucumber or the mango, man himself, as well as the earth, the various metals, indeed the whole universe, are but compounds of elements that are either hot or cold, or else (if one is to resort to secondary food classifications that are more appropriate to non-food substances than the sweet/sour antinomy) dry or moist, hard

1. Which is a real potential danger because of the quick alteration of food in a tropical climate.

or soft. They never formulate this worldview as such, but it is implicit in their understanding of the effects of food. This is no indication, however, of the persistence of a pre-scientific conception or image of the body or of the universe, for the Hyderabad Muslims interviewed had correctly integrated modern scientific knowledge. One might rather say that by professing this medico-culinary discourse, they tend to preserve a body of knowledge which they have inherited from generations past: what we have here is a tradition in the making.

Food represents, though to varying extents, a potential danger for the Muslims of Hyderabad, a danger which is all the more present as gastronomy is one of their chief concerns. Once the danger has been identified, they proceed to circumscribe it through the rational use of their culinary practices, with the help of their specific medical discourse. This discourse is properly speaking medical, because it aims at the perpetuation of good health. Yet it seems at present to exist on its own, independently from any general theory of the functioning of the body or of the universe. This only apparently contradicts the view of authors like Levi-Strauss, who hold that cookery is a language in which the worldview of a society is embodied. There is indeed a gap between, on the one hand, the culinary discourse of the Muslims of Hyderabad and the worldview to which it seems to refer, and on the other the modern worldview to which they have now come to adhere. This gap is a symptom of the crisis which the Hyderabad Muslims are presently experiencing as a society which is in the process of being uprooted from its past.

THE SCHOLARLY DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE

The Hyderabadis do conceive of a link between their daily food practices and the science of the specialist. They occasionally call upon the *hakim* to complement their limited knowledge or abilities. They buy from him all kinds of preparations, especially syrups and pastes (*khamira*) prepared out of sugar, honey and different active ingredients. They especially consult him as a dietician in case of ailment, thus acknowledging the fact that proper food is part of the remedy, and that the *hakim* is a specialist in these matters.

But this is only the most obvious and superficial link between "folk science" and the professional doctor's knowledge. Closer study reveals that these popular discourses and practices on nutritional hygiene do not make way for improvisation. They are actually rooted in

scholarly discourses and practices in which a millennial Hindu heritage, the contribution of Islam and a strong regional identity are seen to converge, as they do in all aspects of the history of Hyderabad.

The Ayurvedic foundations

Behind the chitchat of seemingly empirical assertions which is commonly heard at Hyderabadi dinner tables, a fair amount of Ayurvedic knowledge is recognizable at once.

Ayurveda, as is well known, is based on a fivefold classification of elements - ether, air, fire, water and earth. These elements, in their various combinations, go to make all the animate and inanimate beings of the universe. From the balance of any specific combination ensues the quality of the object which it constitutes. Every human being, therefore, must pay attention to the seasons, to his circumstances of life, to his own type of constitution (the Ayurveda distinguishes between seven such types), and take care to harmonize them all. The essential combinations are based on the food intake. Ayurvedic science therefore focuses on the choice and circulation of ingested substances. It professes that ailments are caused by defective circulation and storage of ill assimilated materials, a belief which finds expression among the Hyderabadis in the form of complaints of indigestion and poisoning. These conceptions are distinct components of the dietetic discourse of the Muslims of Hyderabad.

The Ayurvedic tradition also certainly accounts for the practice of defining the quality of a substance on the basis of its external characteristics. According to the old Ayurvedic treatises, a heavy and hard substance is dominated by the element "earth", and strengthens propensities to heaviness, roundness, stability; a liquid, cold, soft substance is dominated by water, and will generate humidity, softness and happiness. A sweet substance is dominated by earth and water, a sour one by wind and ether. Considering that the excess or lack of one of the elements may generate a number of ailments, the link between choice of food and bodily disorders appears obvious. Excess of wind, for example, causes deafness, cataract, torticollis, etc., the cure of which is the ingestion of sour, salted or sweet foods, whose taste indicates the presence of another dominant element.

Digestion is central to this alchemy, because it converts the elements of exogenic bodies into easily assimilated substances. Appropriate cooking is essential here, as harmful storage in the body is caused by raw or ill-cooked food which is not in accordance with the

"power of fire" of the eater (*agni* - which has also been flatly translated as "enzymes")¹. Food is sometimes too "hot", or the eater too "cold", for the function to be conveyed normally. Thus if cooking in Hyderabad means being concerned with medicine, medicine itself there may be viewed as cookery.

Ayurveda, however, only represents the lowest substratum of the scholarly knowledge on food hygiene in Hyderabad. The practices of the Hyderabad Muslims owe more to Unani medicine, the latter being basically viewed as an "Arabic" science.

The Unani conceptions of food hygiene

Unani medicine, like Ayurvedic medicine, is a science of elements, humours, combinations. The *hakim* acknowledges the existence of the four commonly known elements (air, fire, water and earth). These elements combine to form the spirit and the organs, which themselves combine to produce energy. Like Ayurveda, Unani medicine rests on a causality principle. Each individual is a product of heredity, of his/her temperament, of external factors and of geo-climatic conditions. Neither water nor fire, however, are viewed as primary elements by the *hakim*, for they themselves are composed of the four fundamental energies, namely heat/cold and dryness/moisture. One recognizes here the binary oppositions which figure in the popular discourse of the Hyderabadis. To understand the stress put on the hot/cold opposition, one only needs to know that according to Avicenna, who borrowed this idea from Aristotle, these are the only two active principles, the other two being passive. Heat also acts faster than coldness.

Food products are said in the *Mizam-ul-Tabaye* to affect the body because of their essence and nature, that is to say their hot or cold temperament. This is further explained in Avicenna's *Canon* : food and drinks affect the body on account of their quality (which derives from their relative heat and coldness) and essence (a specific property born out of the combination of diverse elements). One must add, however, that Avicenna also classifies food products into other categories (light/heavy, rich/poor, healthy/unhealthy), all of which have been ignored in our Hyderabad treatises. Their authors appear to have simplified the ancient discourse in favour of a single hot/cold

1. This fire refers to the original sacrifice in Hinduism, transferred as explained by MALAMOUD in the body of the sacrificer itself as an auto-sacrifice. See MALAMOUD.

dichotomy. Milk, for instance, is quoted as cold, and mango as hot, in the *Zubdat-ul-Hikam*. Exerting his critical mind, the author remarks that the authorities disagree on these classifications: *channa dal*, for instance is sometimes shown as hot and sometimes as cold. The best food is of moderate temperament, and is to be taken in moderate quantities. The *Mizam-ul-Tabaye* cites as a good diet wheat bread, domestic chicken and fresh fish.

The *Zubdat-ul-Hikam* enumerates the properties of all possible foods. The classification runs into the following 14 chapters:

- Fruit, such as grapes, sweet and sour pomegranate, melon, watermelon, coconut, etc.
- Vegetables and herbs, such as mint, garlic, onion, beetroot, cauliflower, etc.
- Grains and pulses, such as wheat, barley, rice, *channa dal*, *mash ki dal*, etc. Also included are varieties of bread such as *nan fatir* (unleavened bread), *nan berenj* (rice bread), etc.
- Fats, milk products and acidic products, such as almond oil, olive oil, sesame oil and ghee; milk, cream, curd, and fresh and dry cheese; vinegar and sour grape juice; etc.
- Meat, such as mutton, goat, beef, rabbit, peacock, deer, camel, donkey, fresh and salted fish, etc.; inners and eggs are also described.
- *Ash* and other dishes such as *ash-e-dogh* (quail soup), *ash-e-zareesh* (barberries soup), *harees*, *kabab*, fried chicken, *qalya*, etc.
- Sweets, such as sugar, honey, *falooda*, *qataif*, etc.
- Water, such as sweet, pure, filtered, purified water, etc.
- Wines, such as red, white, old, new, sweet or bitter wine, lemon wine, pomegranate wine, water-lily wine, etc.
- Preserves such as bitter oranges, ginger, rose and vinegar, coriander, etc.
- Perfumes such as rose, amber, musk, sandal, etc.
- Nuts such as walnut, pistachio, almond, etc.
- Aphrodisiac products and methods.

Many of these products are not typical of India, but rather of the Muslim civilization of Avicenna's time, and many of the *deccani* food products are not even mentioned. There is nothing under "mango" or "pineapple", but a section on "peaches" is provided. The pulses described are those which are typical of the Mediterranean area, while

the breads are of Iranian origin. Olive oil is not used in Hyderabad cookery. Some strange meats are described, which are never referred to in the poems or travelogues of the time. *Qataif* is a typical turkish delicacy. This shows the limitations of these treatises, the contents of which were mostly copied from previous works. Nevertheless, thanks to the wide range of information provided on food products, they were useful not only to the doctor but also to the food specialist, who could draw ideas from them on how to vary menus for example.

The fourth preface of the *Mizam-ul-Tabaye* gives indications on how to determine the temperament of food stuffs. It can be known from past experience, that is to say by referring to ancient authorities. It can also be guessed or discovered experimentally: the food should be given to a patient of moderate temperament, and any change in his body temperature noted thereafter. But, the author goes on to say, it is hard to tell whether the rise in temperature is really due to the ingestion of the food... These are exactly the procedures followed by the Hyderabad Muslims: resort to tradition, analogy or experimentation. An experiment, according to the same treatise, can be conducted on an animal first, and then on a man, provided the man is of the same temperament as the animal.

According to Unani medicine, human beings themselves are more or less hot or cold, and each part of their body has its own warmth. Consequently, certain food products are specifically suited to certain persons and ailments. Ailing patients can be cured by their contrary (something cold being given for an excess of heat) or by their like (something hot being administered to a sick person, or for an organ, classified as hot). Both the patient's heart and fried chicken can be labeled as hot according to Unani science, therefore fried chicken is a cure for heart patients. Conversely, according to the alternative logic, alcohol, being hot, is suitable only for persons with a cold temperament. There is an obvious link in this discourse between heat and blood: people who eat too much meat - a fact most likely to occur in a Muslim society - must be bled, provided the doctor is careful that they don't get too "cold".

From food to poison

As regards the quality of food, Unani treatises rank substances along a four-degree scale. The distinction is based on the effects which these substances produce on the body: grade I substances have little effect; grade II substances are active if administered repeatedly; grade III substances produce noticeable changes; and grade IV substances

may harm or destroy the organism. This is actually a scale from food to poison based on medical observation, and there is no gap between the several categories, a view which the Hyderabadis have well integrated. They consider that they can be poisoned as well as cured by food and, as will be seen, they also consume certain medical products as food.

The *Mizam-ul-Tabaye* is even more precise regarding these links between food and remedy. According to its author, whatever is ingested in the body belongs to one of four types, namely pure drugs, pure food and the combination of both with a domination of one or the other. Meat juice, alcohol, egg yolk, etc., are considered pure food, because (once again) they are closer to the intrinsic nature of blood. The *Zubdat-ul-Hikam* describes the medical effects of food products: rabbit meat helps sliming, *ghee* as well as *falooda* are good for the lungs. The *Unani pharmacopoeia* mentions orange *sharbat* as a diuretic, rose *sharbat* as a sedative...

The frontier between food and drug is then very tenuous. The *hakim* uses food preparations for health purposes: he knows the properties of *kababs* and *byriani*, and mixes fruit juices and preserves in his drugs. His prescriptions, on the other hand, are often tantalizing: *murrah* of quince or apple, syrups of pomegranate, *halwa* of egg yolk (with nutmeg, safran, musk or sugar to improve the patient's complexion), *halwa* of carrot (composed of milk, *ghee*, sugar, walnuts, hazelnuts, almonds, coconut, pistachio, etc., and reputed to be an aphrodisiac), *halwa-e-salab*, a mix of wheat flour, *gram*, *ghee*, honey, sugar, nuts, etc., which is another aphrodisiac.¹

Food is viewed by Unani doctors as the form under which a medicine is easiest to ingest. They therefore cultivate the art of making drugs palatable and assimilable. The Vth section of the *Unani pharmacopoeia* is entitled *halwa* (sweets or sweetmeats), i.e. soft preparations of drugs which are pounded with sugar and honey in order to give them a pleasant taste and to preserve them. Section XIII is about *majoon*, pastes which are based on sugar or honey so that they may be taken with pleasure.

When a patient is reluctant to take a pure drug, the *hakim* knows how to treat food so as to give it curative virtues. He can provide preparations which are meant to be given to chicken and pigeons before consuming the latter. It is said in Hyderabad that a king, under the Abbassids, was cured from constipation with grapes picked from

1. See IMPCOPS: *Unani pharmacopoeia*.

especially treated vines. Avicenna also describes another indirect cure, obtained by providing an appropriate diet to the wet nurse of a sick infant.

Combining foods: the *hakim* as a food consultant

While describing the properties of food products, the Unani treatises also deal with their combinations, since the point of reference of Unani science is the "balance of the temperaments".

According to the *Mizam-ul-Tabaye*, vinegar and rice, chicken and curd, *harees* and pomegranate should not be mixed. Generally speaking, no two hot or cold products should be used in association. The ban on the mixing of fish and milk products is also mentioned in the treatises. It is however Avicenna who unveils the origin of this principle:

According to the experimenters of India and other places, acidic things and fish should not be taken together with milk, otherwise diverse chronic ailments, including leprosy, will occur.

This is a clear example of how Arabic science borrowed from the Indian (which may itself have borrowed from the Greeks, the Egyptians, the Semites). Avicenna gives other such examples which he draws from that ancient knowledge of harmful combinations:

According to them, curd should not be taken with radishes or bird's meat, neither barley flour with milk and rice. In the same way, fat and oil kept in copper utensils should not be used for cooking purposes and one should not eat kababs roasted on castor-wood.

Here lies the origin of many of the principles which the Hyderabadi Muslims apply in daily practice regarding the proper mixing of elements in a meal, be they food products, metals or cooking media.

The Unani treatises also pay attention to seasons. The *Zubdat-ul-Hikam* deals at length with the matching of food with climate. Spring, it says, is the time when the body is most fragile, because more blood is produced during that season. The diet should therefore consist of cold, light and dry food. In the Summer, the body temperature rises on the outside while it is lower inside. Consequently, the author argues, the food intake should have hot properties (a conclusion which is not shared by the other manuals we have studied). Food, at that time, should also be light, because the body has more difficulty in digesting

it. The author gives precise examples of adequate food for the Summer: domestic chicken, veal cooked in vinegar, and sour apples or sour grape juice which help digestion. In the Autumn, which is a season of moderate temperament, food should be neither hot nor cold and not too dry. An appropriate diet for the Autumn may consist of the meat of a one year old sheep, sweet grapes, and dried figs or raisins. Soups (*shorba*) and other fruit should be avoided since they thicken the blood. In the Winter, when the weather is cold and humid, cold and moist food, the *hakim* says, should be shunned. One can have, for example, lamb or beef, *harees*, honey sweets, figs, pistachios, filbert nuts, fried meat, while parsley, beetroot, onion, cabbage, cauliflower must be avoided as being likely to provoke colds. These considerations prove conclusively that daily food practices in Hyderabad are rooted in the scholarly discourse, but the latter runs into much greater detail than the popular knowledge as regards food in relation to seasons.

Similarly, the Unani treatises are very accurate on the healthy food combinations, which they dub as antidotes for the harmful effects of other foods. According to the *Mizam-ul-Tabaye*, sweet and sour foods (which Hyderabad Muslims call *mitha* and *khatta*), as well as sour and fried foods, are to be mixed, because such mixtures are good, and because they rectify each other¹. The *Zubdat-ul-Hikam* gives hundreds of examples of such good combinations. Wheat and milk, cream and honey are some of the simplest. Some of these combinations are close to actual recipes: peacock with black pepper, ginger and cinnamon; rabbit with fennel seeds, raisins and ginger; fresh fish with old wine; salted fish with vinegar and caraway; plums or *mash ki dal* and cooked almonds. Some sound like menu suggestions: *samosa* with old wine, quail soup and *halwa* of vinegar, *qataif* and sour pomegranate, quail and *harees* of wheat, fried meat and lime juice. Such knowledge is vital to a cook if he is to avoid (for instance) making people deaf by mixing black gram and radish in their meal. It will also enable him to prepare the ideal food combination for a TB patient: beef fried in ghee and rice bread, violet *sharbat* and *falooda*. There is evidence to show that, from the 17th century onwards, the combinations of foods recommended in these treatises were actually put into practice. In the *masnavis* in which wedding feasts are described, the dishes always clearly appear to be arranged in a given order,

1. Although the author is here critical of his predecessors and claims that their theory of the mixing of foods is not correct: according to him, everything can be mixed if a little time is allowed to elapse between successive food products. Anyway, he says, the body has the faculty to rectify harmful combinations. But he concludes by saying that any bad effect has its remedy and goes on with the description of healthy combinations.

according to a particular logic, as if some of them had to be taken in association. In the *Gulshen-e-Ishq*, for example, there are piles of *byriani* and *burani*, there are *kababs* and vinegar and cheese, which are to be eaten together.

These medical treatises not only provide prescriptions, they also stimulate culinary creation, or the gourmet's appetite. The cooks of Hyderabad could derive inspiration and guidance from them when elaborating menus or creating recipes. Until the middle of the 20th century, every important man in Hyderabad had a *hakim* by his side, as well as a cook (if not several), so that it was easy for both kinds of specialists to collaborate. As the *hakim*'s task was more important than the cook's, the latter had probably to submit to the former's advice. Thus it can be advanced that Hyderabadi cookery, to this extent, is based on the medical knowledge of the ancient Greeks.

Many more examples could be given to show how the medical discourse on nutritional hygiene which prevails among the Muslims of Hyderabad is rooted in systems of thought well established in India. We have had to distinguish between Ayurveda and Unani medicine for the sake of discussion. Hyderabadi Muslims also make the distinction, especially nowadays, as Ayurveda is an expression of Hindu forms of thought. Yet it must be remembered that the Ayurvedic works were either lost or destroyed during the medieval period, and that the knowledge which they contained was subsequently altered. Similarly, while Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine* is still used by the *hakims* of Hyderabad as a vade-mecum of Unani medicine, Greek knowledge was seriously altered on entering India and made to suit Indian conditions. As a matter of fact, this adaptation to the local environment was a necessary precondition of its curative efficacy. Those doctors who arrived from Gilan or Shiraz therefore translated the Indian medical treatises as soon as they arrived in India. Mian Bhawa, an eminent courtier at the court of Sikander Lodi (1489-1517) who composed a treatise of Unani medicine, wrote thus:

Unani medicine in its existing form does not suit the temperament of the people living in the changing climatic conditions of India (...). The names of the drugs are in the Persian or Unani language, and are unknown to the people of India (...). The Unani doctors cannot obtain what they want, and there is no other alternative than the translation of the books of the Indian physicians.¹

1. Preface to *Madan-ul-Shifa* Sikander Shahi in *Bulletin of the Department of History of Medicine*, vol.II, n.3, July 1964, Osmania Medical College, Hyderabad.

These two systems of thought have never entered into competition. They have borrowed from each other, without even mentioning their common origin in beliefs originating from Central and West Asia. The medical knowledge on which the Muslims of Hyderabad elaborate consists in the main of the theories and practices of the *hakims*, including their tint of Ayurveda. This brand of medicine resembles the community in which it is used: it is Muslim to the point of pretending to be Arabic, and yet it strikes deep roots in the Hindu culture which gives its shape to India. The oldest book on Unani medicine, the *Tibb-e-Shifa Mahmood Shahi*, which represents the first instance of the conjunction between the Indian and Persian medical traditions, belongs to the region of Hyderabad.¹

The image of the doctor, then, is far from being unprepossessing for a Hyderabadí Muslim. The *hakim* is a reassuring figure, because what he knows as a professional is what everyone practices as an amateur. The basic principles of the medicine he uses have long been forgotten by the common man, but the sweetness of this medicine seduces him. The relationship which it establishes between the doctor and the patient, the sick man and the remedy, is of a kind that may have existed in Western societies, but has been lost since long. It is a relationship of pleasure. The *Zubdat-ul-Hikam* insists that food will not be easily digested which has not been eaten with pleasure, and that even the drinking of a little wine enjoyed with the food helps the digestion process. Far from encouraging asceticism, the *hakim* helps the eater to enjoy food by teaching him appropriate ways of mixing and matching the components of his diet. Moreover, he favours the progress of the culinary art. By so doing, he actually obeys an instruction of the Quran, which encourages the faithful, as a reward, to eat whatever is best. And he proves to be an effective ally of a tradition of cookery which, though it was born in Baghdad, reached its highest state of perfection under the Moguls in India.

COOKERY AND WELL-BEING IN HYDERABAD

For the Muslims of Hyderabad, good food and a healthy diet have always been compatible, and cookery and well-being, in their view, go hand in hand, though the principles on which they base their creed are a far cry from those of modern dietetics. They claim that their cookery is not only more tasty but better balanced. Their idea is that the "others"

2. see SHAH M.H.

(which means Hindus, especially those from Andhra), from what they know of their cookery, **do not mix the ingredients properly, or in the correct order, and even mix substances that should not be mixed**, such as fish and curd of course, which is an oft quoted example. The ambivalence of Hyderabad Muslim cookery almost seems to belong to its essence: all the recipes appear to have been influenced by the *hakim* and virtually every cook there is also a dietician.

The *hakim* as a better cook

The Hyderabad Muslims claim that lots of recipes have been invented by the *hakims*. We have seen above how medical advice can actually look like food-counselling. It is a fact, furthermore, that whoever claims to be a *hakim* must be a perfect cook, *i.e.* know the ingredients, and master the cooking stages. In their laboratories, the *hakims* often have aides who mix and pound the substances for them, but they must control personally the actual cooking of the preparations. Their skills are inherited. To become a *hakim* in Hyderabad, it seems, one has to be born from a *hakim*. *Hakims* are mostly men, but girls are entitled to inheritance, and some famous Hyderabad *hakims* in the 1990s are daughters of renowned *hakims*. As the practice of Unani medicine involves technical skill (the proper mixing and cooking of substances) as well as creativity (in devising new efficient and palatable combinations), there are good and there are mediocre *hakims*. And as the cooking tips and popular recipes are carefully safeguarded by the families, there are dynasties of good *hakims* in Hyderabad.

The *hakims* are fine confectioners, because a number of their drugs involve the use of sugar or honey at various stages of their preparation. They are believed to have perfected the recipes of the *sharbat*, *halwa* and *murrabah* at the court of the Muslim rulers of Delhi, and later on under the kings of the Deccan. They were attached to the persons of the princes, and when they did not have to treat them as patients, they spent their time making life sweeter for them in laboratories that were both culinary and medical.

When a new substance was presented at the court, it was their task to test it for harmful properties and to find out which combination would make it most easily assimilable. They were actually expected to devise good recipes rather than good prescriptions (as a matter of fact, the same word, *nuskha*, is used in Hyderabad to convey both meanings). When Asad Beg, who had been sent by Emperor Akbar to the court of Bijapur, discovered tobacco there for the first time, he

hurried back to Delhi to bring it to his *hakims*. They investigated this curiosity that the Portuguese had introduced into India, and came to the conclusion that it would be harmless if mixed with sugar and inhaled through water. Thus they had found the antidote, and Asad Beg took the narghile they had prepared with confidence.

Hakims are so appreciated for their "cooking" that Hyderabad Muslims often used to order preparations from them (as many of them still do today) for the mere sake of eating good food. These products can be consumed without danger, even in the absence of a medical indication. The nature of these remedies is such that they suit a healthy as well as a sick body. They can be used preventively as tonics, as well as for therapeutic purposes. The *hakim's murrabahs* are very popular and children of "good" families used to find them on their breakfast table everyday, next to English style marmalade. The *amla ka murrabah*, which is full of vitamin C, for example, was a favourite. The *hakims* used to prepare hundreds of *sharbat* and preserves from different fruit and herbs. Their *motiya ka sharbat* is a good alternative to the traditional refreshments in the Summer. They also used to prepare well-balanced combinations of spices, *masalas*, that not only gave taste but beneficial effects to whatever food items they were cooked with. A *hakim* whom we interviewed, himself the son of a *hakim*, though increasingly drawn towards allopathic medicine nowadays, still keeps the recipe book of his father, which includes a delicious preparation of spiced Kashmiri tea and diet *kababs*.

Having to deal professionally with food, spices and drinks, the Unani doctors not surprisingly developed a liking for the culinary art. Hyderabad Muslims consider them as good cooks and employ them in that capacity. In several cases during the fieldwork conducted for this study, *hakims* presented the author with favourite recipes or even dishes prepared under their personal instructions that were not meant for health purposes, but only represented the best renditions of Hyderabad culinary classics. *Hakims*, in case of need, can even make up for the mistakes of cooks. It once happened, according to one informant, that a careless cook, on a formal occasion, had used bad ghee while preparing a *byriani*. The desperate host called in the *hakim* for help. The doctor, who knew that santal keeps its good smell while absorbing bad ones, put white and red santal sachets in the rice, and thus the wedding feast was saved.

The *hakims*, it is said, similarly influence the composition of menus. In present day Hyderabad, *burani* (a preparation of curd spiked with onions and herbs), is served alongside *byriani*, because the

hakims have declared this to be a healthy combination (which is supposed to prevent the constipation usually caused by rice, and to be good for the brain). In all likelihood, the classical association of *kicheri* (rice and lentils cooked together), *ghee* and *achar* (hot and oily pickles) can also be traced back to Unani medicine. This combination, according to the specialists, is good for blood circulation.

The doctors, finally, are also the most likely sources of inspiration for some strange recipes which occur in 19th century Hydrabadi cookery books, such as mutton stewed with pomegranate or moon flowers (*ipomoea bona nox*), or the mercury *byriani*. The latter is a very complicated recipe, because the metal must first be introduced into eggs, which are then to be hard-boiled, placed into the rice, and ultimately discarded, the mercury "filling" alone being kept. The incense flavored *sharbats*, which used to be so popular in Hyderabad in the olden days, may have been served also on account of their supposed antiseptic properties. These types of rarities actually often took shape during the earliest stages of Hydrabadi cookery. The cooking of moon flowers is mentioned in the *Gulshen-e-Ishq*, and rose, musk and amber-scented waters and *sharbats* in the *Mah-wo-Paikan* Az. Both instances are clear proof of the interference of the *hakims* in culinary matters.

The *baghar* : cookery, alchemy or medical science?

The final touch of many a dish in Hyderabad is the *baghar*: garlic cloves, caraway seeds, dry whole red peppers and curry leaves (*murraya koenigi*), all deep fried separately in boiling oil until they blacken and their aroma comes out. This crackling and this smell are typical of Muslim cookery in Hyderabad. The *baghar* is poured over dals, and on *kut* (a thick tomato soup). Through this process, the essential oils of the spices are extracted, and this alone betrays the influence of the naturopathic doctor.¹

It seems, however, that *baghar* in the past was prepared in a more complex manner. Once the spices had been blackened separately, the oil was set to cool down. Thereafter it was filtered, and then poured into a dish in which a red hot horse-shoe had been placed. The whole

1. Maybe this should be analyzed in a deeper manner, and compared with the Greek way of nourishing the Olympian gods through the smelling of smoke (a practice actually borrowed from the Egyptians). That perfumed smoke issuing from food or incense was a link between earth and heaven, an offering to deities in the sky, and it was shared, in its material form (the "leftovers" of this cooking process) by the men on earth.

thing was covered and let to stand for half an hour, after which the strong scented oil could be used. The Muslims of Hyderabad also speak of gold, silver or *ashrafi baghar* (the *ashrafi* being the gold coin of the Nizams). It seems that the coin was thrown into the oil before the end of the frying process. It is also said that a lady of the town used to have her food cooked in a silver pan with a lid to which a chain holding a piece of gold was fastened. When dishes were thus covered, the gold would scrape the pan and therefore cook with the food.

What could be the motivation behind such practices? Without doubt to mix particles of metal with the food, however small these particles might be¹. The Greeks and the Arabs, together with an alchemy, had developed a lithotherapy. Unani treatises do prescribe the use of such ingredients as pearls or mercury. Doctors in Hyderabad often mix gold or silver leaves into their drugs. Ayurvedic medicine itself makes use of metal ashes. The medical properties of metals are in fact widely recognized by the Hyderabadis. It might be that the essential qualities of the metals, like those of garlic or caraway, can only get released under high temperature, be it dry heat or through the medium of oil or water. Pregnant women, in bygone days, were given water in which a red hot horse-shoe had been dipped. In these interesting culinary practices from which gastronomy has nothing to gain, the doctor, obviously, has taken precedence over the cook.

From Avicenna to present day Hyderabad

That there exists a link between the scientific knowledge of the ancient Greeks and the contemporary discourse of the Hyderabad Muslims is fairly clear. The crucial role which medical science has played in the making of the Hyderabad culinary tradition is equally obvious. But how did these elements of knowledge actually travel from the 14th century hospital to the 20th century kitchen? This is a less easy question to answer. The common man in Hyderabad does not read Unani treatises, all the less since they are written in the Farsi language and in the Deccani script, both of which are hardly intelligible to the

1. In medieval times, all natural elements were used as medicines because they were all viewed as linked to man within the framework of a cosmological approach to life. In Europe itself, stones, especially when precious, were recognized for their virtues and used in powder form or rubbed on affected areas. H.Coulon tells of a prescription to Isabeau de Baviere, in 1420, which included emerald, ruby, pearls... Elagabal was said to mix gold and pearls in his food. One of the most popular preparations of the *hakims* in Hyderabad includes pearls, which they claim are the only assimilable form of calcium for the human body. (see S.Ctapier Valladon, "Modes medicales", in POIRIER 1990).

inexperienced reader. However popular and apparently accessible it may have become, Unani medicine has retained an esoteric character, notably because of its strong links with astrology and alchemy, which entail that most preparations and combinations are secret. The *hakim* does not give dietary "prescriptions" to every individual. Professional cooks do not approach the *hakims* everyday for advice.

What the Hyderabad Muslims profess and practice is the accumulated knowledge they have gained from being counselled by *hakims* from generation to generation. Moreover, there are books to help the cooks remember the basics of food hygiene. The *Nauratan Abbassi*, for instance, contains a whole chapter on the qualities of foods, which closely resembles the corresponding chapters in the Unani treatises. Each food item is analyzed in terms of its temperament (*tab'iat*), type of harmfulness (*muzvir*), antidote (*musleh*) and quality (*kaifiyat*). A cook can learn from this book that *muzzafer* is not good for kidneys but excellent for the brain, or that figs are a cure for heart diseases, or again that *byriani* should always be had with *burani*, *kicheri* with mango *achars*, shrimps with black cuminseeds and *jalebis* with pomegranate (these being the antidotes to the noxious effects of these foods). Milk and fish, incidentally, are pointed out here as causing cholera when ingested together. The author insists that his book provides the basic medical knowledge which every good cook must command. He must be conversant with temperaments, seasons, combinations, etc., besides being fully acquainted with the preferences of his patrons and the prevailing fashions of his time.

Thanks to such books, medical science has percolated into the popular mind, and has survived the passing of time. As all other forms of knowledge in India, it has been passed on from mother to child (in the case of the common man), or from guru to disciple (in the case of the professional). The prestige of a *hakim* is far above that of a cook, however talented the latter may be, and his social impact is incomparably wider than that of a housewife who restates the Unani principles for the benefit of her granddaughter. Yet they all perpetuate, though at different levels, the same ancestral knowledge, the heritage of which is only shared nowadays by the Muslims of India, and probably nowhere more respected than in Hyderabad.

The relationship between cookery and medicine in Hyderabad is indeed complex. The knowledge of cookery is necessary to the doctor, who cooks and preserves recipes and invents new ones for his patients' health and pleasure. The knowledge of medicine is essential to the cook, who must know how to combine foods to produce fully

enjoyable meals, that are easy to digest and not harmful to health. Both have kept exchanging methods and recipes. Their arts have been so closely associated in the past that there has been a time when doctors were the cooks par excellence. Traces of this closeness are still visible today. There is something royal about this conception of food, which is designed for luxury and ostentation, but with a central concern for the preservation of the health of the irreplaceable person of the (kingly) eater. This conception emerged within the sophisticated culture of Baghdad under the Abbassids, and became well acclimatized in Delhi and Hyderabad. It goes together with a time-consuming and delicate style of cookery, an alchemy whereby gold and pearls are transformed into food for the sake of princes.

What is the future of this style of cookery today? As already stated, it is based on a view of the body and of the universe which is not current any more among the Muslims of Hyderabad. It was also dependent on a certain socio-economic and political order which is now equally out of sight. The heyday of the Hyderabad Muslim nobility is gone, and the members of this class do not have any more the financial means and even the time to realize these highly individualized recipes. Their political downfall is thus reflected in a decline of their gastronomy, and experienced by them as a loss of the harmony between pleasure and health which this knowledge ensured.

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GLOSSARY

- achar* : hot pickles in oil, usually of green mango or lime.
- ambada* : ambari hemp (leaves of *hibiscus cannabinus*).
- anla* : emblic myrobolan (*emblica officinalis*).
- belambu* : emblic myrobolan, Indian gooseberry (*averrhoa bilimbi*).
- byriani* : spiced rice and meat or vegetables, cooked in layers and mixed before serving. The best is the Hyderabadi *byriani*.
- burani* : curd spiked with onions, herbs and green chilies. Served with *byriani*.
- channa* : gram (*cicer arietinum*).
- chutney* : a paste like pickle, to be eaten fresh.

<i>dal:</i>	: any cooked split pulses.
<i>dastarkhan</i>	: the traditional Hyderabad way of serving food; a long red or white cloth, spread on the floor.
<i>falooda</i>	: a semi-liquid sweet, traditionally made with tapioca, a favourite during ramzan or in the Summer.
<i>ghee</i>	: clarified butter.
<i>halwa</i>	: sweet, confection of tender consistency.
<i>harees</i>	: a thick gruel of wheat, mostly served with meat chunks.
<i>harpha rauri</i>	: Indian gooseberry (<i>averrhoa acida</i>).
<i>jalebi</i>	: a fried twisted pastry, dipped in syrup, of Arabic origin.
<i>kabab</i>	: a dry preparation, usually of meat.
<i>kheema</i>	: spiced minced meat, a favourite with <i>kicheri</i> .
<i>kicheri:</i>	: rice and <i>dal</i> cooked together, the poor man's dish in India, a favourite for breakfast in Hyderabad.
<i>kut</i>	: a thick soup, usually with tomatoes.
<i>masala</i>	: a mixture of spices.
<i>masnavi</i>	: a long poem, composed of series of distichs rhyming in pairs.
<i>mosambi</i>	: sweet lime (<i>citrus sinensis</i>).
<i>motiya</i>	: a sort of jasmine
<i>murrabah</i>	: fruit preserves, the fruit is generally steamed first and then immersed in the syrup.
<i>muzzafer</i>	: a sweet made out of vermicelli, a favourite for Idd-e-Ramzan.
<i>nizam</i>	: the title of the Asaf Shahi kings of Hyderabad.
<i>qalya</i>	: a dish of fish usually, in a gravy with a special <i>masala</i> .
<i>qataif</i>	: layered pastry filled with nuts and dipped in syrup, of Turkish origin.
<i>samosa</i>	: a triangular puff filled with <i>kheema</i> .
<i>shahzira</i>	: black caraway (<i>carum bulbocastum</i>).
<i>sharbat:</i>	: a flavoured syrup of fruit, flowers, to be diluted in cold water.
<i>shorba</i>	: soup, of meat usually.
<i>toovar</i>	: red gram, pigeon pea (<i>cajanus dc</i>).

urad : black gram (*vigna mungo*).
zira : caraway (*carum carvi*).

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